

January 22, 2004

The Honorable Henry Hyde  
Committee on International Relations  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

As international humanitarian assistance organizations and other non-governmental organizations concerned about the present crisis facing vulnerable populations, particularly women and children in areas of conflict, we urge you to schedule a markup and hold hearings on HR 2536, the *Women and Children in Conflict Protection Act of 2003*. This bill helps to ensure that the United States Government develops a strategy and authorizes funding to provide for the protection of women and children whenever the U.S. Government responds to emergency and crisis situations.

As you are aware, today's conflicts are fought in and around homes and villages, taking a tremendous toll on civilians, particularly women and children. Rape, military recruitment of children, sexual exploitation, and family separation are widespread. For example, in northern and eastern Uganda, 1.3 million people, of which 800,000 are children under the age of 15, have been displaced by the conflict between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army. In a conflict where children are primary targets, an estimated 8,000 children were abducted in the past 12 months alone.

Moreover, in the aftermath of armed conflicts women and children face terrible risks. For example, in Liberia women and children continue to be targets of rape and military recruitment from government militias and rebel groups that continue to roam the countryside. They, like many other children living in the Middle East, are experiencing war first hand. In Iraq, children are still in need of safe places to go to school and play. Support for these children, which will allow them to grow into healthy adulthood, is essential to obtain a lasting peace in the Middle East.

*The Women and Children in Conflict Protection Act of 2003* would require the U.S. Government to develop and implement a strategy to ensure that its humanitarian programs respond to and reduce the risks of exploitation, violence and abuse of women and children in places like Uganda, Liberia, and Iraq. It also authorizes funding specifically to support protection programs. The act also seeks to prevent future crises by creating a list of early warning signs to alert policy makers of possible risks to women and children. By focusing on reducing threats to innocent civilians in crises around the world, the United States can foster stability in conflict-prone environments, which is essential for lasting peace and security.

Mr. Chairman, this bill has strong bipartisan support among Committee Members. We sincerely hope that you will join in supporting this urgent and essential bill to provide protection to women and children in conflict areas around the world. If you or your staff

would like further information or have additional questions, please contact Carol Miller of Save the Children at (202) 467-1438, or Wendy Young of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children at (703) 560-2621.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Air Serv International  
American Jewish World Service  
American Near East Refugee Aid (ANERA)  
American Refugee Committee  
Amnesty International USA  
AMREF USA (the African Medical and Research Foundation)  
AMURT (Ananda Marga National Relief Team)  
Better World Fund  
CARE  
Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE)  
Christian Children's Fund  
Church World Service  
Citizens for Global Solutions  
Concern America  
Congressional Hunger Center  
Family Violence Prevention Fund  
Friends Committee on National Legislation  
General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church  
Global Health Council  
Immigration and Refugee Services of America/ U.S. Committee for Refugees  
International Medical Corps  
International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC)  
International Rescue Committee  
Jesuit Refugee Service  
Korean American Sharing Movement (KASM)  
Lutheran World Relief  
Management Sciences for Health  
National Council of Women's Organizations  
Operation USA  
Oxfam America  
Presbyterian Church (USA)  
Refugees International  
Relief International  
Save the Children  
US Fund for UNICEF  
Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children  
Women's Edge Coalition  
Women's Environment Development Organization (WEDO)

World Learning  
World Vision  
YMCA of the USA

Cc: Members of the United States House of Representatives Committee on International Relations

